



The Work of Antiracism at Bates

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Clayton Spencer



Dear Members of the Bates Community,

In light of the national crisis arising from ongoing police killings of black people and accompanying public outrage at the ways in which we persist in diminishing the value of black lives, I wanted to reach out to affirm my personal commitment and that of the college to our faculty, staff, students, and alumni of color and to the work of antiracism.

I want to respond, as well, to members of our community who have been in touch with me recently to learn what Bates is doing concretely to disrupt structural racism on this campus, in the lives of our faculty and staff, and in the education of our students. I also want to share the plans we have now for intensifying our efforts, and how we will hold ourselves accountable for progress.

Before turning to specifics, I want to acknowledge the deep pain and hurt felt by black, indigenous, and people of color who are members of the Bates community. These are heavy times, as we find ourselves in the midst of three interlocking crises – the pandemic, the worst employment economy since the Great Depression, and race-based killings and the devaluation of black lives. Any one of these crises alone would be powerfully disorienting and fear-inducing, but taken together they can feel overwhelming, not least because each of them lays bare the same deep cleavages and profound injustices on which our society, including Bates College, is built.

Speaking with students of color over my time at Bates, I have learned again and again that I do not have the lived experience to begin to grasp the pain and isolation they feel on a daily basis as they navigate life on this campus. But I do understand that it is a serious failure when we continue to fall short in making “the emancipating potential of the liberal arts” a reality for all of our students, faculty, and the community as a whole. We know that black, indigenous, and people of color at Bates are subject to racist acts, and we know that we have not achieved a campus and culture where every student is supported for success across all aspects of their experience, and where faculty and staff from traditionally underrepresented groups are adequately supported in their professional growth and development. These failures go to the essence of our mission, and I regret that we have not made greater progress in closing the gap between mission and reality at Bates, particularly for our students, faculty, staff, and alumni of color.

I also take it as a call to action. The issues of structural racism that Bates partakes of are long-standing and deeply ingrained, and overcoming them will depend on sustained, collective effort across the institution. In doing this work, we are building on foundations laid by others. I want to recognize the leadership, intellectual contributions, and efforts of many people who have worked at Bates over decades to create a more just and equitable environment at the college. In particular, early faculty-led efforts, in response to student interest and critique, created curricular paths that introduced important disciplinary perspectives to our campus, and challenged historic and normative traditions in the academy. These are now encompassed within Africana, American Studies, and Gender and Sexuality Studies. Many faculty and administrators, as well, served in an array of institutional roles that are precursors to the current Vice President for Equity and Inclusion, the Office of Intercultural Education, and ongoing faculty efforts to promote curricular transformation and inclusive pedagogy.

Moving forward, we will continue to center the work of equity, inclusion, and antiracism as a core institutional priority and build on the efforts that have been undertaken with particular focus and energy over the past several years. We will take the following specific actions:

- **We will ask each member of senior staff to develop a plan for racial equity work in their part of the college by September 1.**
 - This past academic year, the entire senior staff and I participated in intensive racial equity training with an outside consultant, and each member of the senior staff was charged with carrying forward racial equity work in their own organization.
 - I have asked each member of the senior staff for a report on progress to date and plans for the coming academic year by September 1.
 - We will synthesize and share this information during the fall semester.

- **We will expand racial equity training across the college.**
 - In addition to senior staff, more than a third of staff across the college (218) have participated in racial equity training over the past three years, as have 34 faculty. The goal will be to make racial equity training available to all staff and faculty over the next two years and thereafter on an ongoing basis.
 - In order to create internal capacity for racial equity education and training, I have committed a discretionary Mellon presidential grant to fund a position of “Director of Equity and Inclusion Education,” reporting to the Vice President for Equity and Inclusion. The search for this position is well advanced and we are optimistic that it will be successful.
 - We are also in the process of creating a website to provide readings, videos, blog posts, and other resources to members of the Bates community seeking to learn more about antiracism.
 - We took the important step of elevating our Chief Diversity Officer position to Vice President for Equity and Inclusion (VPEI), who serves as a member of the senior staff. The work of the VPEI includes assessing the campus climate and needs of the college through the lens of equity, inclusion, and antiracism, and collaborating with colleagues across the college to develop specific strategies and plans to move the work forward.
- **We will extend our efforts in curricular transformation, inclusive pedagogy, and the support of all students for academic success.**
 - Bates is one of 57 colleges and universities across the country that won a \$1 million, multi-year grant from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute Inclusive Excellence Initiative. The goal is for any student at Bates who is interested in STEM to be provided with an inclusive curriculum, support structures, and dedicated faculty and staff mentors to ensure that they have the opportunity to thrive. We received the grant in 2018 and our work under its auspices will extend through academic year 2022–23. Our efforts and progress to date are described here.
 - We have undertaken similar work in curricular transformation and inclusive pedagogy in the Humanities and Humanistic Social Sciences with the support of a \$1.2 million grant from the Mellon Foundation. That work will continue through 2024.
 - Moving forward, the Dean of the Faculty will work with colleagues to extend these efforts across the curriculum at Bates, phasing the work as appropriate, because these initiatives are very faculty intensive. The goal is to provide Bates faculty with ongoing professional development in inclusive pedagogies and evidence-based practices that lead to equitable outcomes for our students.

- **We will work actively to promote policies, practices, and structures that support faculty from minoritized and marginalized groups in their work at Bates and in their academic careers.**
 - Our hiring practices will continue to improve the ways we are building the Bates faculty for the 21st century. The Active and Inclusive Search Plan is an effective tool, and we have seen important gains in the tenure track searches over the past several years. For example, in the past five years, almost half (49%) of the new hires for tenure-track positions are black, indigenous, and people of color.
 - Bates joined the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity (NCFDD) in the fall of 2018 in response to interest and recommendations from faculty of color. We will continue the opportunity, begun last year, for pre-tenure faculty in their first or second year to participate in the year-long faculty success program offered by the NCFDD.
 - The Tenure and Promotion Review Committee will begin in the fall to socialize with the faculty changes that it is considering to broaden and clarify the standards and processes for reappointment, tenure, and promotion. The call for a review of these processes reflects our desire to ensure that our standards for evaluation eliminate bias to the extent possible, recognize the importance of inclusive pedagogies, and embrace emerging fields of scholarship. The entire faculty community will have opportunities in 2020–21 to ensure that the language incorporated into our handbook is clear with respect to substance and process and reflects our shared aspirations for the faculty of Bates.
 - The Committee on Personnel (COP) will continue the practice, adopted two years ago, of beginning its work each year by studying the ways that bias can be embedded in the materials used in the evaluation of faculty. The objective is to elevate awareness of bias on the COP and strive toward equitable processes for reappointment, tenure, and promotion.
- **We will extend systemic and structural change across the entirety of the student experience.**
 - The Office of Admission will continue to recruit, admit, and enroll students from historically marginalized backgrounds, building on the enrollment of two of the most racially diverse classes in the history of the college with the Classes of 2023 and 2024.
 - Our Student Affairs staff has taken the lead over the past several years in providing racial equity training for its entire staff and holding each area of its operations accountable for tangible progress. This work will be continued in the coming academic year, and it encompasses many aspects of the student experience.

- Student Affairs departments have overhauled their policies and procedures so that they are clear and available to all students in a fair and equitable manner. These policies apply to a broad range of student support services, including Accessible Education, the Academic Resources Commons, Counseling and Psychological Services, and Health Services.
- Equity- and inclusion-related programming has been added to a number of areas, including training for leaders of student organizations and clubs and training for student staff in residential life. Additional programming focused on equity includes Breaks at Bates, Purposeful Work initiatives to ensure equitable access to resources and programs, and new racial equity programming as part of first-year orientation. Additionally, equity and inclusion values are being embedded in a comprehensive student leadership framework, funded by the Arthur Vining Davis Foundation, that will inform the further development of 20 leadership programs across the college.
- The Vice President for Equity and Inclusion is in the process of completing hiring and planning for the Bobcat First! Program in the Office of Intercultural Education (OIE), which supports first generation to college students across all dimensions of their Bates experience. Additionally, they will appoint a student advisory committee for the OIE that will provide a leadership opportunity for students to shape the work of the OIE as well as racial equity work across campus.
- In the coming academic year, we will assess the Student Support Advising system with the explicit goal of improving support for black, indigenous, and students of color.
- Leadership and staff in the Office of Security and Campus Safety have undergone multiple series of racial equity training, including training on procedural justice and de-escalation techniques. A Security Advisory Council (SAC), composed of students, has been appointed to work with the office on a range of issues, including issues of bias and racism. A number of recommendations from the SAC have been implemented, including posting student-facing policies on the website, student notifications when a report is written about a particular student, and the availability for a student to provide their account of an incident prior to a conduct meeting. In addition, the office has increased efforts related to relationship and community building with students. In the coming year, the office will undergo additional training and will invite the Lewiston Police Department to join.

- **We will fundraise, and assist students in fundraising, for efforts related to antiracism.**

- The Bates Student Anti-Racism Coalition is a group of student clubs led by the Africana Club, the Black Students Union, and the Caribbean Students Association, with support from the Bates College Student Government and a range of Bates-recognized clubs. The Coalition has come together to initiate a fundraiser for three racial justice organizations that work to support black communities: Color of Change, #FreeThemAll, and Liberation Farms Somali Bantu Community Association. Information on how to contribute to this effort will be forthcoming from the Coalition early this week.
- Two Bates trustees will match gifts made by alumni to support a new series of Purposeful Work internships for Bates students working at organizations committed to ongoing racial justice work. Information on this challenge will be released the week of June 22.
- In addition, the financial aid challenge currently offered by an anonymous Bates donor will be expanded to match new gifts to the Benjamin E. Mays Scholarship Fund, which is a financial aid endowment fund established through a gift from the estate of Dr. Mays, with a preference for an African American student. The fund has been added to over the past 35 years through gifts by alumni, parents, and friends.

- **We will improve our support for, and engagement of, our alumni of color.**

- In January, 2020, the former Director of the Office of Intercultural Education joined the College Advancement office to evaluate alumni engagement programs through the lens of equity and inclusion and to lead the development of programs designed to increase our support for alumni of color.
- We will begin enacting the resulting plan at the beginning of the new academic year.

To succeed in these efforts, and particularly to create a body of progress that is greater than the sum of the parts, we need actively to seek to understand the experiences of the black, indigenous, and people of color in the Bates community. We need to talk to each other and listen to each other. We need to explore issues of inequity and injustice with the rigor we apply to other subjects. This won't happen unless we demonstrate that we are, collectively, willing to identify, acknowledge, and address issues, and that we have the commitment and capacity to repair harm and make change.

This work has always been important to Bates, it is urgent in this moment, and it is the right and human work to do. I am grateful, as ever, for your help and solidarity as we carry it forward together.

Sincerely,

Clayton